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ABSTRACT

This report outlines the major findings and recommendations of a study of drop-outs and "divergent youth" in Los Angeles public schools. The purposes of the research were to: identify the divergent youth population; study current practices and options which negatively impact the students' social and academic progress within the educational system; and recommend alternatives which may result in a higher percentage of completion and/or more appropriate educational options for divergent youth. Among the major findings are the following: (1) Attrition at the high school level is high between grades 10 and 12, and shows significant increases each year. (2) Most high schools experienced varying percentages of students who reached age 18 but who were not eligible for graduation. (3) Most junior and senior high school administrators attribute the increasing attrition rates to the large percentages of poor achievers who score substantially below minimum levels in reading and mathematics and experience repeated academic failure. Most of the other specific findings suggested the need for improvement of: the placement of divergent youth in special programs; their curriculum; and the operations of the juvenile justice system. Two sets of recommendations for assisting divergent youth are presented, one for under- and non-achieving students and the other for students with behavior problems. A general conclusion is that many students and dropouts with behavioral problems were originally in the failure syndrome/non-achiever category. (KH)

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FOR YOUR INFO
FROM GABE CORTINA

Los Angeles Unified School District

A SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS FOR DIVERGENT YOUTH

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Prepared for the Office of the Associate Superintendent

William Anton

February, 1982

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I. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

During the 1981-82 school year, an administrative subcommittee was formed by the Associate Superintendent of Operations, Mr. William Anton, with the following objectives:

- Identify the divergent youth population as defined by school administrators, juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies
- Study current practices and options which negatively impact their social and academic progress within the educational system
- Recommend alternatives which may result in a higher percentage of completion and/or more appropriate educational options for divergent youth

Many of the terms used by educators and program planners to describe school-age youth who are unsuccessful, or who pose behavioral problems are too broad for an examination either of their attributes or of the educational configurations they may require. Terms such as "drop-out," "potential drop-out," "divergent youth" and other terms overlap essential distinctions necessary to plan programs significant for educational planning. For the purposes of this review, a distinction is made between:

School-age youth who were divergent because of academic failure and were either continuing in school as poor achievers or had already dropped out of school, and school-age youth who were divergent because of negative behavioral patterns toward other youth, school staff or the community.

The second grouping includes school-age youth enrolled in school, school drop-outs and chronic truants and youth offenders intending to return to schools from the juvenile justice system. Additionally, the youth population studied is limited to secondary youth, between thirteen and eighteen years of age.

II. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

A. Annual District publications on attrition at the high school level indicate percentages of at least twenty to seventy percent attrition between grades ten and twelve, with all schools showing significant increases each year. Administrators reported that:

(1) As many as ten percent of junior to senior high school transfers do not show up for high school enrollment

(2) A significant number of tenth graders do not complete the tenth grade

(3) In a given year, the number of twelfth grade students drops as high as sixty-five percent between the October (fall) and June (year end) reports, as reported by Bob Crain, Supervisor, Permits

B. In addition to the significant attrition rates, most high schools experienced varying percentages of students who reached age eighteen and who were not eligible for graduation. This was attributed to:

(1) The assumption by some students that they must remain in school despite the strong possibility that they will not graduate

(2) The automatic grade classification year by year which results in students being classified (or being generally known) twelfth graders after two years regardless of credits earned

Recent District policy has established minimum credit requirements for grade classification, but many students seem unaware of this change.

C. Most junior and senior high school administrators recognize that the increasing attrition rates are due in part to:

(1) The large percentages of poor achievers who score substantially below minimum levels in reading and math

(2) Those who have suffered academic failure year after year

Junior high administrators generally felt that this poor achievement was a continuation of a similar pattern begun in elementary grades. Several administrators noted that cumulative records indicated long term patterns of poor/non achievement throughout all elementary grades.

D. Administrative concensus placed the percentage of negative behavioral type students requiring special placements at three percent or less of the total student body. Most recognized the need to plan for and place behavioral divergent students differently than failure/potential drop-out type students. However, there is evidence that this critical distinction is not being made. Referrals to continuation school, opportunity schools and programs, and opportunity transfers were made sometimes because of behavioral problems, truancy, and absenteeism.

E. Most junior and senior high schools have experienced a sharp decrease in elective classes for educationally divergent youth. The highest percentage of reductions seems to correspond with those schools having the highest level of "failure syndrome" students. Especially hard hit are shops, homemaking, art classes, music and drama. Upon close examination these factors seem to be involved:

(1) The increase of students requiring remediation classes in addition to required academic classes which leaves significant percentages of divergents with few or no elective options

(2) Limitations on summer school credits to augment credit needs

(3) The continuing emphasis of the single high school diploma requirements as the primary basis for program planning and recognition of achievement

F. Most divergent youth, while actually needing more practical and social adjustment type offerings (i.e., vocational classes, job preparation, work experience, psychology, drama, leadership) are systematically programmed out of these options as a result of:

(1) Additional academic remediation

(2) Entrance requirements for electives

(3) A lack of electives specifically designed for poor academic achievers

Regional Occupational Programs, Vocational Education classes and Regional Occupational Center offerings required threshold academic achievement, elective credit capability and positive behavioral habits for admittance and have been limited to eleventh and twelfth grades.

G. Local school involvement with business and industry, in a manner which results in cooperative vocational planning, job training, work experience, and employment, seems to be linked only to regional occupational centers and the R.O.P. Since most school age educational divergents are not participating in these programs, a significant percentage of potential drop-outs and non-academic-achievers are not linked to programs that result in developing job skills and employment opportunities.

H. There seems to be no requirement that all students received a "balanced" curriculum of academic courses, practical arts, fine arts, social adjustment, and career/job exploration and preparation. Many failure syndrome students are enrolled only in academic classes, furthering the possibility of these students dropping out when a practical alternative is available (continuation school, employment, etc.) or developing negative behavioral traits that will lead to truancies, on-campus loitering, or opportunity transfers.

I. Most administrators agreed on the need for additional and coordinated options for negative behavior divergent students. Junior high administrators indicated that their only practical tool at present is the "opportunity transfer." Senior high administrators indicated options which included: opportunity transfers, continuation schools, shortened day schedule, work experience and adult school programs. In the 1979-80 school year, 8900 "opportunity transfers" were completed, with only 100 at the elementary level. This figure is increasing yearly, according to Bob Crain, Supervisor, Permits.

J. Several pilot programs recently launched at San Fernando, Jordan, and Roosevelt High Schools have combined the divergent youth populations with vocational skills classes in skill centers; attitudinal counseling and vocationally oriented remediation. Additionally, the Private Industry Council (City of L.A. Manpower Agency) designates local businesses and industrial sites as work experience sites that link students to future jobs.

K. Meetings with juvenile court judges, probation and district attorney officials indicated that there are plans for a substantial increase of court processed returnees to public schools for placement. This will include some who may or may not otherwise have been confined for longer periods. Judge Randy Moore indicated that this results from a severe shortage of juvenile detention facilities and expected cuts in current juvenile justice programs. It should be noted that the average cost per slot/year for detained offenders is approximately $30-40,000!

L. All juvenile justice agencies indicated a lack of re-entry processes from the courts and camps to local schools or alternative options.

M. School personnel indicated a critical lack of awareness of the returning juvenile offender's status, his/her special needs or his/her potential problems.

N. Most administrators and juvenile justice agencies agreed that the single most prevalent behavior which contributes to campus unrest is attributed to gang involvement.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for divergent youth are presented in two groups to reflect the vast differences in instructional planning and supportive services required by each grouping. It is our conclusion that:

- Many, if not most students and drop-outs with behavioral problems were originally in the failure syndrome/non achiever category
- Continued academic failure and lack of approved social recognition will contribute to enhance the breeding grounds of negative behavior in schools

Group I: NON/UNDER ACHIEVERS; DROP-OUTS; FAILURE SYNDROME DIVERGENT YOUTH (see "Appendix A")

A. Re-examine the instructional planning process which has caused academic remediation courses to replace all or most other non-academic elective classes in junior and senior high schools. An indepth analysis is needed to further explore comprehensive alternative programs for these students. Consideration should be given to the requirement that all students receive a balanced curriculum including:

(1) Academic courses
(2) Practical arts
(3) Fine arts
(4) Career exploration, world of work/job skills preparation
(5) Classes which develop essential personal and social skills

B. Make available in-school vocational programs, including ROP and VEA classes, and regional occupational center classes for all students, regardless of academic standing. This would require the development of "hands on" instruction and vocationally oriented remediation taught by both academic and vocational instructors. This would also require extensive teacher in-service preparation.

C. Explore and develop student participation programs and elective classes not dependent on academic standing, including leadership classes, social understanding and adjustment classes, clubs, school, projects.

D. Explore the feasibility of an alternative to the standard high school diploma, or develop more than one category of diploma to allow academically poor students to develop success through practical arts, fine arts and/or social leadership skills. Academic achievement would continue to be stressed; however, it would be infused into the basic career cluster selected by the student. Access to the most current educational options, such as School Within-A-School (SWAS), core classes, and continuation classes are seriously limited for non/under achievers because all must first conform to the standard District diploma requirements.

E. Provide a comprehensive instructional approach to assure coordinated program planning by all units which impact junior and senior high schools and educational option programs. Such an approach would maximize and match District facilities and funding sources with the greatest needs of specific student populations. This would facilitate program planning responsiveness to the needs of large student segments, rather than by program source, funding agency requirements or division responsibilities.

F. Develop and strengthen ties between local secondary schools and business and industry to develop sources for:

(1) Work experience
(2) Employment opportunities
(3) School support
(4) Business/industry involvement in the development and execution of vocational training and job preparation classes.

Agencies such as the Private Industry Council (PIC) have indicated an interest in focusing and financially supporting pilot job preparation programs for divergent youth.

G. Provide all instructional and administrative staff responsible for large segments of academic failures with specific sociological and motivation techniques to encourage school attendance. All educational planning for this group, whether for in school or out of school, should be based on a highly motivational, non-punitive basis.

Group Two: STUDENTS WITH BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

A. Develop a continuum of in-school and off-site educational options which reflect the most appropriate student placements reflective of the cost for such a program. The continuum should take into account the special factors inherent in the placement of negative behavior students and out of school youth, including but not limited to:

- Male/female (combined? separate?)
- On/off campus (or adjacent to campus)
- Age range mix (16-18?, 13-18?, 13-16?)
- Instructional Day (minimum day/regular day)
- Content of program (academic/vocational/both?)
- Adult/student ratio (8:1?, 12:1?, 10:1?)
- Supportive services needed (counseling, PSA, security?)
- Length of program (weekly/semester/year/"forever?")

- Safety to/from others (violence, gang related)
- Legal considerations (EH, EMR, handicapped, pregnancy?)
- Re-entry provisions for camp returnees

B. Establish a centralized Student Adjustment Service which provides:

(1) Coordinated referral services

(2) Educational assessments and supportive service planning for negative behavior students moving between schools and from schools to off site options

(3) As a direct linkage from the juvenile justice system agencies.

Such a service would link student needs with available options and maintain critical data needed by schools, the probation department, and the courts.

C. Programs for behaviorally negative students should be designed with the primary focus of behavioral modification and movement to another program on the continuum, upon the meeting of appropriate behavioral changes. These fall within the education code sections as opportunity and adjustment programs and should not be randomly intermixed with continuation and alternative options for students who are not behavioral problems.

D. Instructional planning and administrative responsibility for implementing programs for divergent youth should not be divided in a manner which separates and isolates this planning from the overall planning of secondary students. Most divergent student options stem from conditions and needs within the school program, necessitating continuous articulation with all school site personnel.

Appendix A

TYPES OF DIVERGENT YOUTH FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Divergent sub groups requiring substantially different instructional planning and support services included two general categories:

I. Failure Syndrome, Non Achievers, Drop Outs

School-age youth for the purposes of this study between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, who may or may not be attending school, but who do not represent behavioral problems (defiance) to other youth or school personnel. These are youth who are academically not succeeding if in school, and who have percentage of divergents, and reflect a substantial and increasing attrition rate district-wide. An overview of the characteristics attributable to this group included the following:

A. Poor readers.....cum records reflect reading problems originating in elementary grades with all subsequent instruction not resulting in a marked improvement

B. Long term pattern of "Fails" and "U's" in junior high, continuing in senior high. Many had failed all academic subjects semester after semester, and had failed remediation classes as well

C. Poor attendance, with large blocks of absenteeism. Patterns of tardiness, late enrollment, class "ditching", and school "hopping" (several schools within a year)

D. General, will "passively" conform to parent and school expectations that they attend school. Still fear "getting in trouble."

Daily motivation directed to this conformity and socializing on or around the campus. Greatest rewards result from interaction at nutrition, lunch, social events, etc., rather than long range goals such as grades, report cards or diploma

E. Many eventually drop-out.

II. Behavioral Problems

School-age youth for the purposes of this study between the ages of thirteen and eighteen, whether attending school or not, with behavioral patterns which have developed into physically threatening relationships with other school-age youth, school personnel, law enforcement agencies, and even their parents. These are youth who have exhibited patterns of school violence acts which vary from fights, verbal abuse and defiance to more serious acts involving life threatening crimes involving weapons and/or personal injury.

For program planning purposes, a distinction should be made between three basic groups within this category.

The First Group - Consists of students who have shown a short or long range history of acceptable physical behavior, but who are still actively enrolled. Patterns which reflect frequent or continued need for administrative action, temporary suspensions and parent conferences. This group includes students who are recipients of opportunity transfers to other secondary schools.

The Second Group - Is composed primarily of out-of-school youth, between thirteen and eighteen who are not currently enrolled, or have dropped out of school, but who continue to intereact negatively with school personnel and/or students. These include long-term truants, "cruisers," gang youth,

loiterers, etc. Both school personnel and law enforcement authorities interact with these youth with undetermined success.

The Third Group - Are those school-age youth between the ages of thirteen and eighteen who have reached a development in their behavioral pattern resulting in an arrest and/or prosecution of students concurrently involved with returning or attending school and interaction with the Juvenile Justice System (Probation, Courts).

Appendix B

SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS CONDUCTED

1. Meeting at San Fernando High School (October, 1981) - Alternative Manpower Training Advisory Council with school staff and members of Private Industry Council to review progress in options model involving secondary youth potential dropouts with community agency counseling, private industry council funding and support and job training linkage at skill center. Attended by Kathy Lee, Gabe Cortina, Ron Prescott, PIC Executive Council.

2. Watts Skill Center (January, 1982) - To explore infusion of secondary-age youth utilizing continuation branch for academic remediation meeting. Attended by Sid Thompson, Bob Rupert, Cal Burke, Gabe Cortina, Bernie Sandoval, Brit Armstead and Andrea Natker.

3. Secondary Administrators and Sylmar Juvenile Justice Center Staff (January 20, 1982) - To receive input from school administrators and members of the Juvenile Justice System related to the processing and availability of options for active (behavioral) and passive (failure syndrome, drop-outs). Meeting attended by Ron Prescott, Gabe Cortina, Bernie Sandoval, Terry McConville (PSA), Judge Nebron, and Deputy Director of Public Defender's Office, as well as the administrators of seven east valley secondary schools).

4. East L.A. Area Secondary Administrators - To receive input related to extent of problem and options related to divergents, both in school and out of school. Attended by Gabe Cortina, Cal Burke, Barry Mostovoy, Bob Sampieri, Santiago Jackson, Ken Johnson, Frank Armendariz, Jack Abderholden, and six (6) Area 6 secondary principals.

5. South Central and Southeast Secondary Administrators with Kenyon Juvenile Justice Center Staff, at the Kenyon Justice Center - To receive input from school administrators and representatives of the Juvenile Justice System related to the processing and availability of options for active and passive divergents. Meeting attended by Gabe Cortina, Bob Sampieri, Sid Thompson, Norm Mathers, Presiding Judge Clay, Supervising DA Kirk Jones, Supervising Probation Deputy Cline Wilkerson, Santiago Jackson, Ken Love (PSA), Ken Johnson, Barry Mostovoy, and administrators from fourteen (14) secondary schools.

6. Meeting with Presiding Judge of County Juvenile Courts - To receive input regarding the flow to and from schools and options from school-age youth involved in the justice system. Attended by Sid Thompson, Gabe Cortina, Bob Sampieri, Ron Prescott and Judge Randy Moore.

7. Junior High School Educational Development Committee - To review committee's perception of problems and solutions for divergent youth. Attended by Gabe Cortina, Ron Prescott, Bob Sampieri, Cal Burke, Andrea Natker, and E.D. Committee.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT ON EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND NEEDS FOR DIVERGENT YOUTH

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Membership:

Gabriel Cortina, Chairperson
Santiago Jackson
Ken Johnson
Kathryn Lee
Ron Prescott
Bernardo Sandoval

Resource Members:

Cal Burke
Barry Mostovoy
Andrea Natker
Bob Sampieri
Sidney Thompson